TL 7240

17 April, 1998

Dearest Luisa and Pinto,

I thought I would take advantage of Abel Guterres' departure for the Convencao to send you a "real" letter for a change. How are you both? And how are you coping with the new and greater responsibilities which each of you recently assumed? I am anxious to know what challenges, headaches, new understandings the role of Coordenadora da Plataforma das ONGs portuguesas is presenting you with, Luisa? It seems that this is a time of transition for us all ...

I returned to Melbourne on Monday morning with a nasty flu (the third this year) which I picked up in Bali, and have been in a slight state of shock ever since. The reason is that an "incident" happened whilst I was in Indonesia which has put an end to my ability to work in that country in my current position of Program Officer.

On 6 April, just as I was about to leave for the airport in Ambon to catch my flight to Bali where I was to conduct an in country meeting of volunteers, I had a phone call from my office in Melbourne, breaking some rather disturbing news. Adrina (the OSB Liaison Officer who took over my job in Jakarta) had been visited the previous week by two delegations (a combined force of Immigration and Intelligence officials) of uniformed men claiming to have seen the two of us together in Jakarta on 17 April, and full of questions as to my whereabouts. My biggest worry was "do they know anything at all about the in country meeting and my involvement with it?". Anyway, the meeting was run without any problems, and here I am safe at home in Melbourne once again! But unfortunately the case is not closed there.

In late March one of our volunteers working on the Thai-Burma border was kidnapped by a group of pro-SLORC Karen rebels. The guy is now safe and back in Australia, but the incident strained the Overseas Service Bureau's relations with our funders, i.e. the Australian Government. At the beginning of May our budget for the financial year 98/99 will be handed down by AusAID, and there is a great deal of concern within my organisation that we will receive further cuts to our budget at this time. Sensitivity to possible future "threats" to our respectability in the eyes of the Australian Government is high! Unfortunately my precarious status is perceived as such a threat, and so I have been asked to give up Indonesia and to consider accepting the position of Program Officer for Thailand (including work on the Thai-Burma border with refugee communities) which is presently vacant. I really have no option but to accept if I wish to continue working for the Overseas Service Bureau. I will probably say "yes", but as you can probably imagine, it is not an easy decision for me to take and I am feeling quite emotionally tired and stressed at the moment.

In connection with the above dynamic of NGO dependency on government funding, I have found the book "Compassion and Calculation" very enlightening and thoroughly interesting! I took it away with me on this latest trip, and it was also photocopied by a large number of our volunteers in Indonesia. It is useful to see what is happening to one's own employing organisation (staff cut-backs, the practice of "doing more with less", lack of independence from government agendas) within a broader international context.

It is getting late and I need to rest, so I will wish you "boa noite" for now. From what I am hearing from the participants in next week's Convencao, that meeting will be a real test of the political maturity of our East Timorese friends! I am sure that you will be following developments closely, and I look forward to your analysis of events.

Um grande, grande abraco,

Kirsty

PS – OMA asked me to forward you a copy of the enclosed communique to Juan Federer in Darwin. It contains a few details of his meeting with the South African Foreign Minister.

PSS – Enclosed also is João Freitas da Camara's correction of the Bahasa Indonesia version of the CCT AIDS/SIDA brochure. He sends you his love!